

## *Lumbering beast's latest is disastrous*

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**Byline:** Peter Howell Toronto Star

### **Body**

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Ardent Godzillians and astute grammarians will note there's no exclamation mark trailing Godzilla: King of the Monsters, as there was in the title of the 1956 movie of similar intent.

I detect a lack of enthusiasm - if not by the showboating humans dealing with a global monster mash, then by the title star himself.

Having reached the momentous age of 65 (the first Godzilla flick came out in 1954), he must be seriously thinking of retirement.

Big G is marginally more involved in the fray here than he was in Gareth Edwards' Godzilla in 2014, where he stomped San Francisco while saving the planet.

But he's still not fully engaged, it seems to me, even with attention-hogging fellow kaiju critters Mothra, Rodan and three-headed Ghidorah calling him out for most of this 132-minute monstrosity.

It takes forever for Godzilla to really get his burn on; he generally seems more peeved than angry. He's the Robert Mueller of movie behemoths.

And it's hard to tell exactly who's munching who, since the film is so murky, it looks as though it was put through a dark blue Instagram filter.

This much we know for sure: the story sucks, the direction by Michael Dougherty is strictly by the numbers and the cast members all look as if they've been advised by their accountants to do more paycheck gigs.

There are some talented actors in this film - Sally Hawkins, Vera Farmiga, Ziyi Zhang, Ken Watanabe and David Strathairn among them - but it's hard to pull a convincing performance out of an assignment that mostly involves staring in horror at a green screen meant to represent a giant threatening bug, bat or lizard.

There are also guys like Kyle Chandler, Charles Dance and Bradley Whitford, who at least know they're in a cheesy monster movie.

Chandler's animal scientist Mark Russell is the most frantic of the lot, shouting things like "We've gotta work fast!" as he rushes to save his preteen daughter Madison (Millie Bobby Brown), who is actually pretty good at looking after herself.

Mark is the co-inventor, along with his estranged paleobiologist wife Emma (Farmiga), of a bio-sonar device called ORCA.

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Originally used to track whales, it has unwisely been MacGyvered by Emma into a monster-summoning gadget that catches the eye of Dance's Alan Jonah, an eco-terrorist for the hell of it.

At least Jonah's not trying to be funny, unlike Whitford's wiseacre sonographer Dr. Rick Stanton.

Various competing factions, including the U.S. military, zip around the planet - from Mexico to Antarctica, Boston to China - awakening slumbering slitherers as they tediously debate the merits of conservation versus kaboom! in order to deal with an environmental problem more urgent than global warming.

Meanwhile, Big G takes his sweet time letting everybody know who the king of the title is. He's possibly even beefier than he was in Edwards' Godzilla, the lead film in the current "Monsterverse" franchise, which now looks some kind of a masterpiece next to this disaster. Maybe he's been working with the same personal trainer who bulked up Ben Affleck to play Batman.

It's unfortunate that we can't really see Big G's eyes beneath his ugly scaly mug and the movie's general murk. If we could, I suspect we'd detect a certain sadness in them. He knows the fickle public has recently shifted its affection, regarding mythical creatures who belch blue flames.

Yes, I'm talking about Viserion, one of the dragon pets of Daenerys Targaryen on Game of Thrones, who was killed and then revived by the Night King and turned to the cold, dark side.

Even as a zombie, Viserion has more acting chops than Godzilla. That's gotta hurt, even if your hide is tough enough to withstand an atom-bomb blast.

Godzilla:

King of the Monsters

(out of 4)

Starring Vera Farmiga, Kyle Chandler, Millie Bobby Brown, Charles Dance, Ken Watanabe, Sally Hawkins, Zhang Ziyi, Bradley Whitford and David Strathairn. Written by Michael Dougherty and Zach Shields. Directed by Michael Dougherty. Opens Friday everywhere. 131 minutes. PG

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